

By JANE ROH
[Courier-Post](#) Staff

Military personnel whose wartime deployments were forcibly extended through the controversial stop-loss policy are now eligible for retroactive bonus pay.

"This is a recognition that individual service members and their families have sacrificed to an extraordinary degree beyond the common sense expectation of their time in theater overseas," said Rep. John Adler, D-N.J., an advocate of the compensation.

Service members who were stop-lossed between 2001 and September 2009 can receive up to \$500 per month for extended deployment in Iraq or Afghanistan. The Pentagon anticipates approximately 174,000 personnel are eligible for the retroactive pay.

Service members already receive \$1,000 in additional pay per month of forcibly extended deployment. The bonus payment, Adler said, is recognition of the tremendous hardship stop-loss imposes on members of the armed forces and their families.

"There's been a real sense of frustration that a loved one was being redeployed again," Adler said. "This is an effort by Congress to reward their patriotism, and it's frankly also a sign to folks who are considering enlisting or re-enlisting that the American people stand behind our men and women in uniform."

Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., introduced legislation last year that would have given service members \$1,500 per month, but no action was taken before the congressional session expired. After negotiations with the Defense Department this year, Congress tucked authorization for the payments into a supplemental spending bill signed last summer. The applications process opened in October.

Congress OK'd \$534.4 million for the payments, but Army spokeswoman Jill Mueller said the Defense Department anticipates \$640 million will ultimately be distributed. The branches of the armed forces will make up their respective shortfalls, she said.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates has been a champion of normalizing service members' deployments. But it is not clear how an additional deployment of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan, announced by President Obama Tuesday night, will affect that process.

The deployment of additional troops will bring the total number in Afghanistan to nearly 100,000 by next spring. Currently 115,000 troops are stationed in Iraq. They are being rotated out in a drawdown plan that will have most troops gone by 2012.

The Pentagon said it would not speculate on how the shifting of troops might affect the winding down of stop-loss.

The policy of forcing members of the military to serve beyond what their contracts stipulate contributed to negative public opinion about the wars. Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld authorized stop-loss after the Sept. 11 attacks and before the conflicts began.

Stop-loss was widely criticized by anti-war activists as a "backdoor draft" in 2006.

The Pentagon plans on cutting the total of stop-lossed soldiers in half by June, and to discontinue the practice entirely by March 2011.